

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY  
PRESS CONFERENCE  
AVIANO AIR BASE, ITALY  
FEBRUARY 20, 1994

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MINISTER FABBRI: (Through Interpreter): I will stop here and now my colleagues will tell you their ideas on the results of this meeting. We will start with Dr Perry, Secretary of Defense of the United States. He is relatively new in his job and I take this occasion to wish him all the best in this new appointment.

The climate of the meeting was very cordial, very serene. We are all aware of the gravity and seriousness of the moment that we are going through.

SEC PERRY: Thank you very much Mr Fabbri. I came here for several reasons, one of which was to gain an assessment of the operational readiness of the NATO Air Forces that are gathered here. And I can report to you, based both on by observations and my discussion with the crews and with their leaders, that these crews and their equipment is in a very high state of operational readiness. They are ready to do any job that we are going to assign them at this time.

Secondly, I wanted an opportunity to meet with the air crews and to explain to them what national interests were at stake, which humanitarian interests were at stake, and why they may be asked to carry out a very dangerous task. And I have had the opportunity to do that.

And third, we needed a chance to discuss among our fellow NATO Ministers here and Chiefs of Staff, contingency plans, rules of engagement, and other aspects that could effect the military operations if they were to be conducted. We have had an excellent opportunity to do that, and I must say that this has been a splendid example of NATO solidarity and NATO unity of purpose. And with that let me pass the microphone over to my colleague, Minister Rifkind.

MINISTER RIFKIND: Thank you very much indeed. The moment of truth draws nearer as the clock ticks towards midnight, tonight, and therefore it was a very appropriate moment for the ministers of defense of those countries that might be involved if air strikes become necessary. To meet together in the way that Dr Perry has indicated, an invaluable opportunity to meet aircrews from our respective countries, to be satisfied as to the operational condition of our aircraft, if they be called upon, and also to hear from the UNPROFOR representative the latest situation in Bosnia. NATO is very determined in its position, and it is therefore that at this time we meet together to exchange views, to report to our

respective heads of government and in due course NATO and UNPROFOR will assess the situation and come to the appropriate conclusion.

MINISTER TER BEEK: Just to add a few words. My colleagues spoke already, also on my behalf, since this meeting was a meeting of unison. We all agreed NATO is ready, NATO is prepared, we are also determined to stick to the course set out by the North Atlantic Council. Of course we all hope that the terms of the North Atlantic Council will be met by the belligerents in Bosnia and that no air strikes will be necessary. However, we are determined to undertake any action needed and there will be no extension of the ultimatum.

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Ok, we have microphones here for the questions, please, Susan.

SUSAN SHAEFFER, Associated Press: Mr Secretary, could you tell us, what do you think, is the glass half empty or is it half full? What is your assessment after meeting with the ministers, has there been enough movement on the part of the Serbs in terms of pulling their weaponry back, or do you think that just not enough has been done?

SEC PERRY: Can you back away from the microphone a little bit, there's an echo, I'm not getting you clearly.

SUSAN SHAEFFER: Question was, is the glass half empty or half full? Do you believe there has been enough movement on the part of the Serbs to hold off on military strikes, or do you think that there still is a lot of movement that has to be taken before the threat of offense action can go forward?

SEC PERRY: I think that depends entirely on the compliance of the Serbs with the ultimatum. We have, we agree that there should be no backing off from the ultimatum, there needs to be full compliance, and there needs to be full compliance by the deadline. We cannot tell you at this stage whether that will occur.

CHARLIE OLLINGER, Reuters: The reports from Sarajevo say that the weather is so bad there, rain and snow, that it would be impossible for the Serbs to fulfill the obligation by midnight tonight. Have you seen any reluctance on the part of the Serbs to carry out the order, and, if its only weather that delays this, then do you see a need for air strikes as long as they are moving toward fulfilling the obligation?

SEC PERRY: The UN Forces have reported to us that they are able to go to all of the area, all of the excluded area, and that if

the artillery piece cannot be moved, they are prepared to disable it and to put a guard over it so it cannot be used. And they will report that to us and we will consider that to be full compliance.

MARK LACY, BBC: This question is especially for Secretary Rifkind as well as Secretary Perry. Do you..., Mr Akashi has said quite specifically, they cannot withdraw fully by midnight. Do you consider that you would then have to carry out air strikes, or are you going to give them the benefit of the doubt?

MINISTER RIFKIND: Well I have not seen the terms of any statement Mr Akashi may have made. I think it is agreed by all concerned that the proper course of action is to wait until the deadline has expired, and there will then be advice from those on the ground as to the level of compliance, whether that compliance has been fully met or whether there is any failure to do so. It is in the light of the decision that is reached on the question of compliance, that the question of what then follows will then be determined. So, its clearly a fast moving situation, there has been some significant progress in moving artillery or in handing it over to the United Nations, but the advice we have received makes it clear that it will simply not be possible to come to a conclusive judgement on this matter until after midnight, therefore its wiser to wait till then, then we will know where we are.

MARK LACY: Does that mean you'll also have to wait till daylight, because obviously it will be dark and you cant see a lot. So are we talking about going into tomorrow until you can actually come to a proper judgement?

MINISTER RIFKIND: It must be for those on the ground, the UNPROFOR Commanders and Mr Akashi, to advise as soon after midnight as is physically possible, as to whether they are satisfied the compliance has occurred or it has not occurred. Naturally, we hope that information will be available at the first possible moment after midnight.

ITALIAN JOURNALIST (Name and Paper unintelligible):(Translation) Can we say after the discussion of today the countdown is stopped and the midnight ultimatum is not there anymore?

MINISTER FABBRI: (Translation) There has been no change in the deadline at all.

JOHN PHILLIPS, London Times: I would like to ask if the decision is made to carry out this dangerous mission of making bombing strikes, what dispositions has NATO made if the bombing strikes are not successful. What will then be the next move if the bombing does not succeed in deterring the belligerents from not meeting with NATO terms?

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MINISTER RIFKIND: I think that is a hypothetical question at this stage. At this moment we are concentrating our energies on the immediate question as to whether there will be compliance. We very much hope that the need for any air strikes at all will be avoided. If we are forced to conclude that is not possible, then it will soon become clear what follows from that. The terms of the NATO Resolution were very clear and very unambiguous.

JAPANESE TELEVISION (Name of Journalist and Station unintelligible):: What are the plans in specific to give support to the ground peacekeepers in case of an air strike?

MINISTER RIFKIND: Could you repeat that?

JAPANESE TELEVISION: Yes, sure. In case of an air strike, what are the specific plans to give support to the peacekeepers in ground?

MINISTER RIFKIND: If I have understood your question correctly, its about the implications for peacekeeping and humanitarian mission on the ground?

JAPANESE TELEVISION: Yes.

MINISTER RIFKIND: Clearly its one of our important objectives, that the humanitarian mission should continue, its doing extremely valuable work and has already saved many tens of thousands of lives. Its also of course very important that any action that might be required, should be fully coordinated between NATO and the UNPROFOR Commanders on the ground, in order to insure the maximum protection for UN Personnel. And we are very satisfied that that coordination is of a very very high order and that Admiral Boorda and his NATO Colleagues and General Cot and General Rose are working very very closely together to insure the maximum protection for UNPROFOR personnel, both uniformed and civilian personnel in Bosnia.

ROBERT GRAHAM, Financial News:: To what extent have you discussed today trying to maintain a broader, overall pressure on the Yugoslav, or ex-Yugoslav situation, namely other trouble spots where you may consider also using air strikes, or have you concentrated exclusively on Sarajevo?

MINISTER RIFKIND: Today we have concentrated purely on the situation as it affects Sarajevo and naturally if the situation in Sarajevo is successful, if there is a proper resolution of this particular crisis then we hope that will be the beginning of a peace process that will bring peace to the whole of Bosnia. But that was not an issue that was discussed today.

ROBERT GRAHAM: A second question. Are you satisfied with the way the Serbs have appeared to have grouped their weapons in

places which are either populated or considered strategic. Is this not a breach at least of the spirit of the agreement, if not the letter?

MINISTER RIFKIND: It is very much for General Rose and General Cot as the UNPROFOR Commanders, to be satisfied as to whether the option of handing over control of weapons to the United Nations as an alternative to withdrawing them beyond twenty kilometers, to determine whether they are satisfied that effective control has been achieved. It has been quite clear, quite clearly indicated that we are not talking about monitoring, we are talking about effective control, and it will be for General Cot and General Rose and Mr Akashi to indicate whether they are satisfied that the steps that have been taken up till midnight today meets that particular requirement.

DAVID MARTIN, CBS: Mr Secretary, what did Admiral Boorda and what did the pilots tell you about the effect of the weather on their ability to carry out the mission that you have given them?

SEC PERRY: The weather, certainly for the last month, has been very poor for air operations and it will continue to be poor, it will be a significant handicap to ongoing air operations. Notwithstanding that, several of the aircraft that we have here have very modern sensors capable of sensing targets, capable of directing precision guided munitions even in the kind of cloudy weather we have now. So, the weather can be a hindrance, the weather could be a hindrance to the air operations, but they will not stop them completely.

This is the last question.

ALLESSANDRO MARTO, (Paper name unintelligible): (Translated) Was the danger of attempts, or terrorism discussed during the meeting?

MINISTER FABBRI: (Translated) There have been threats to Italy made by representatives of the Serbian extremists. The Italian intelligence as well as that of the allies consider that in that territory there are no missile installations which are capable of reaching the Italian soil. If any attacks were made against Italy by air or sea, by ships, we are confident, we have complete confidence in the protective screen of the alliance which has been ready and active for several months. And we have adopted all possible measures to face any possible threat of the terrorist kind. Also, today our allies have confirmed their willingness and their readiness to give us all their assistance to face this kind of threats.